



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Director of the Conflict Prevention Center, Ambassador Herbert Salber

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Mr. Chairman,

We welcome the remarks by Conflict Prevention Center (CPC) Director Ambassador Herbert Salber on the critical issue of our time: border security. This is an issue which directly affects all of our capacity to have an impact on illegal migration, trafficking in narcotics and persons, and terrorism. As such, in our view, it makes border security one of the most pressing security issues this organization faces. We need open and secure borders. Open, to foster commerce, and thus strengthen our economic security. Open, to foster travel, and thus strengthen people-to-people ties and security in the human dimension; but secure also to protect our countries and their citizens from the direct threats from traffickers, criminal activity, and potential terrorists.

The OSCE has great potential to improve security throughout the region through improvement in border security management. Terrorists and other criminals are increasingly globalized, and travel extensively. They are also heavily dependent on illegal trafficking in guns, drugs, people and money. Border management represents our first line of defense, the best opportunity to stop this activity.

The OSCE, through its workshops and conferences run by the Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU), has already taken steps in the past few years to provide training on travel-document and container security. The OSCE has also provided training for border forces, but we believe, could do more. Many OSCE participating States, including my own, are taking important steps to improve border security now. We seek greater oversight of travelers through programs such as Passenger Name Record, the introduction of biometrics, improved visa processing, and broad sharing of visa look-out and lost/stolen passport information. Meanwhile, many participating States, including my own, are helping others bilaterally in the region with programs to train personnel, provide equipment to computerize operations, to detect radiation threats and to better review cargoes, and to help improve border stations.

All these programs could benefit from better coordination, and even wider application throughout the OSCE region. We should be seeking nothing less than the transformation of the OSCE into a "region of excellence," in which our participating States are second to none in the world in adopting key international standards, in applying the best available technology, and in placing the best trained border service personnel in the field. We should all be making important contributions to borders that are open, yet secure.

Ambassador Salber, you have briefed us on some of the border management activities that the CPC is engaged in. I would like to briefly touch on some other activities that should also be considered.

First, the OSCE needs to establish a baseline assessment of the situation across targeted OSCE regions. This would assist all of us to strengthen their border security and management, including capacity building and cross-border/regional cooperation. The OSCE should also review what bilateral and multilateral donors are already doing in the field, to avoid overlap and duplication and to provide a basis on which participating States may make formal requests for assistance to the OSCE or other international organizations.

Second, we should be promoting dialogue concerning the major problems faced in border security and ways to address them. This should be done through a series of experts' workshops, aimed at recommending training and project activities to develop improved border control standards. Specific training for border services and competent national authorities could be provided via an OSCE border support project.

Where needed, the OSCE should also consider developing norms and standards, but in many cases we believe these efforts are underway in other organizations with greater expertise, such as the ICAO, International Customs Union, or Interpol. What we can best concentrate on is adapting these standards for use by our participating States. These could be presented in best practices guides, a key step in creating the region of excellence that I spoke of earlier.

Ambassador Salber, you have outlined a robust view of what the OSCE should do. However, your presentation did not touch upon several important items, such as detection equipment or computer databases, that are essential in 21st century border security. Moreover, we should also focus on improving the border management capacities of OSCE Partner States. Upon request, the OSCE can and should do more in providing support to our OSCE partners in this important area.

Of course, we cannot do everything all at once, or we risk accomplishing nothing. We hope that as a result of a better baseline assessment of relative needs, we can focus our activities in places they are most critically needed, and then take concrete actions to improve border security management within the OSCE region and beyond.

With this in mind, Ambassador Salber, I would like to pose some targeted questions to you today: First, what future initiatives do you envision in border security in the OSCE, and are you planning to engage formally with other international and regional organizations on this issue? Secondly, given the sheer demands of such a wide-ranging task as border security, where do you see the resources coming from, how would you plan on concentrating OSCE's resources, and over what time frame?

Thank you.